

Point of Order—Mr. Epp

make sure that the fundamental principles of the House of Commons are not abused.

Mr. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I have listened carefully to the submissions that have been made. I want to touch on certain aspects such as the written correspondence questioned. When the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) put forward his submission, he made it quite clear that there was an obligation to table. If that was one of the questions which was before you, which it is, then it is quite clear in Beauchesne's that that obligation was on the Minister, and the Minister complied with that obligation properly.

The question has been raised as to whether written correspondence should or should not be referred to in the House, whether Members in the House should bring forward into the House written correspondence from constituents or from others who might write to them in their capacity as Minister or as Member of Parliament, asking them to make representations on their behalf. The question is whether this written correspondence should or should not be before the House without the consent of those who have written the letters. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to reflect because I believe that in principle there is very little difference between what happened last week, to which we are referring today, and examples which happen virtually weekly if not daily in the House of Commons when Hon. Members of the Opposition bring forward letters from constituents which speak about policy and personal problems, using those letters to impugn the character and abilities of Ministers on this side of the House.

● (1630)

Mr. Blenkarn: We do not use the Ministers' letters.

Mr. Evans: I refer specifically, Mr. Speaker, to letters which were written to the Hon. Member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty), which have been read in part in the House to support allegations that the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Bussières) is not doing his job. The point is not that he is a Minister and we are something different. The point in this point of order which was raised today with regard to letters tabled in the House is that letters to Members of Parliament are somehow privileged communication which should not be used in the House of Commons without—

Mr. Blenkarn: No, no.

Mr. Evans:—without the permission of the individual who wrote the letters. That was the point which was raised and, I feel, legitimately, by the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and the Hon. Member for Northumberland (Mr. Hees). They raised those points to say that those were privileged communication. They should not be raised and made public without the express authority of the writer. Yet it happens daily, Mr. Speaker. It has happened on the question of metric, on the question of Revenue Canada, and on numerous subjects. The Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands

(Miss MacDonald) made public an oral conversation which she had had with a constituent about a question last week—

Miss MacDonald: And I always check first.

Mr. Evans:—and the Speaker called her to order saying that that was a specific case and she should perhaps not be raising such a specific issue on the floor of the House.

Miss MacDonald: Come on, you are missing the point.

Mr. Epp: That means we could never raise any points.

Mr. Evans: I believe, Mr. Speaker, the question you must rule on is whether Members of Parliament, Ministers or otherwise, are free to make correspondence addressed to them public in the course of debate. That is the question which was raised by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain. I believe it goes much deeper than that. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the question of representations made by individuals to influence public policy is a different form of correspondence from letters which contain issues which constituents wish us to raise with, for instance, Revenue Canada or National Health and Welfare with respect to proper servicing by the Public Service.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to examine in the context of your ruling the question of whether there is a difference between correspondence which is communication to show concern or to raise issues of service by the Government, and correspondence the sole purpose of which is to influence the content and direction of public policy. I suggest that a case can be made that there is a difference when a private citizen corresponds with the sole purpose and intention of influencing the direction of public policy. I would like you, Mr. Speaker, to consider whether or not the privacy which some Members would associate with that type of correspondence might not be somewhat less because it is a representation to influence public policy. And what are the rights of an individual who attempts to influence public policy in written correspondence? In other countries they have dealt with that issue on representations and perhaps—

Mr. McGrath: That is not relevant.

Mr. Evans:—that should be considered as well. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if you were to find or consider that this was a legitimate point of order, and that in fact it was improper in some way for the Minister to have referred to that correspondence, it would seem to me that that ruling would have to go across the board, that any correspondence to a Member of Parliament which is not accompanied with an authorization of the individual to make that correspondence public, will be automatically ruled out of order in this Chamber as a matter of debate. Because, Mr. Speaker, there is no difference between a private citizen making a representation to the Minister and a private citizen making a representation to me, to the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands or to others.